Comrade Chintamani

In the early hours of 31st July, Comrade Chintamani passed away.

Saathi Chintamani was born in the village Mustafabad Saraiyya of Kadipur tehsil, Sultanpur district in eastern Uttar Pradesh. He studied till class 12th. Rejected tempting offers for converting to another religion. Joined as an impounding official in the Department of Agriculture, Uttar Pradesh government. While he was on duty once, realizing dues, he thrashed some people for insulting him over his caste. To avoid upper-caste backlash, he left his permanent job and moved to some relatives at Faridabad. After working for a month or two each at Bata, Goodyear, Dabur, Escorts, etc., he became a permanent worker in Gedore Tools. Together with the job, he was active in politics of caste of the Ambedkarite current. Long conversations with Com. Vijay Shankar of neighboring Babripur village strengthened his grip upon the new reality of having become, and of being, a wage-worker.

In 1977 wage-worker stirrings intensified greatly in Faridabad, and *Saathi* Chintamani was very active in them. He lent special support to the militant workers of Usha Spinning and Weaving Mill and the Bharatiya Electric Steel Factories. He was among those who left eighty unions to form *Majdoor Sangharsh Samiti* (Workers' Struggle Committee). In 1979, many workers were killed in police firing in Faridabad. After internal emergency was lifted in 1977, Com. Vijay Shankar was dismissed from his job for his role in the Delhi Faridabad Textile (DFT) strikes. Wage-workers from Bata, Gedore, Poritts & Spencer, Electricity Board, Handa Steel, East India Cotton Mills, Orient Steel, Leatherite, etc. got together with Com. Vijay Shankar at Azad Nagar *jhuggi* (shanties) and Mujesar for collective study of Karl Marx's book, 'Capital'. *Saathi* Chintamani was among them.

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar began publication in 1982. *Saathi* Chintamani was among the group of intensely active wage-workers who, besides participating in other activities of FMS, also contributed Rs. 25 each month and Rs. 100 at the time of annual bonus. Along with other comrades at the Gedore factory, *Saathi* Chintamani was also active in everyday occurrences in the factory. The company's scheme for retrenchment of workers was actively supported by the union; *Saathi* Chintamani was among those who opposed these tactics, and was beaten up for it. When all machinations failed, the management and union got rid of 1500 workers over a year by taking refuge under protective umbrella of the police within the

factory premises and assaulting workers reporting on and leaving from duty. A union with a militant image, CITU, breathed its last in Faridabad. During two-and-a-half years of intense activity, the experiences, ideas, and steps we saw taken by wage-workers in the factories destroyed the Leninist basis of FMS. Publication stopped after May 1984.

The new series of Majdoor Samachar commenced publication in 1986. *Saathi* Chintamani had stayed on in Gedore, and was selling cups and saucers on a hand-cart to meet expenses, moving from place to place to make up for the company's refusal to pay wages for months and months. The routine of one to two thousand copies per month of Majdoor Samachar was broken in December 1993 with the publication of 5000 copies. The new wave of stirrings of wage-workers in factories in Faridabad was the second aspect of big and important changes that were taking place during 1992 – 2000. *Saathi* Chintamani's activities expanded during this period.

During this time, things went to further extremes in the Gedore-Jhalani Tools Company. Physical assault in the plants, part payment of wages, wages outstanding since eight months, when “leadership” of all hues and colours was rejected by the wage-workers, 100 workers were sacked from the factory with one stroke to keep control on the workers. *Saathi* Chintamani was among them. Small affinity-groups of workers from the Gedore-Jhalani Tools Company had become the bees in the district administration's bonnet and had knocked at all levels of state and central government, but outstanding wages kept increasing. *Saathi* Chintamani, along with a friend from Delhi, sought opinion from a senior advocate in the Supreme Court, who opined that if a company does not pay wages, workers cannot obtain the same through legal processes. This became a point of departure for workers of one factory to go amongst those of thousands of factories by writing their experiences and ideas on placards.

When wages of 14 months were due in the Gedore-Jhalani Tools Factories, affinity-groups of 15 to 20 wage-workers would carry placards with their experiences written on them and stand along those roads from which hordes of other wage-workers would pass during shift changes. For about a kilometer, passing workers reading these experiences on placards held by workers made the issue of one factory into an issue of workers of thousands of factories. *Saathi* Chintamani played an active role in this. Standing on different roads on different days, holding placards everyday, they started giving contour to the self-activity of workers in Faridabad, and to the conversation of workers with themselves. The state reacted, and

after meetings in Chandigarh, payment of wages commenced. To reign in the workers, new attempts began at establishing leaders. *Saathi* Chintamani, along with others, foiled these exercises. Six factories of Gedore-Jhalani Tools Company (three in Faridabad, one each in Kundli, Aurangabad and Jalna) closed. *Saathi* Chintamani went to Jalna and Aurangabad in Maharashtra to co-ordinate between workers.

Middle-persons (middlemen) have an established modus operandi when companies wind up: Unions sign agreements with the management forfeiting nine-tenths of the workers' legal dues. *Saathi* Chintamani, along with other comrades, broke this modus operandi in Gedore-Jhalani Tools. Instead of letting union leaders cash in on the helplessness of individual workers, hundreds of workers took collective steps without any representatives or leaders. Fifteen years of trials and tribulations at the High Court ensnared by union leaders brought Gedore-Jhalani Tools workers Rs. 15-25-30-40 thousand by a union agreement with the company, for which the union took Rs. 5,000 beforehand. Meanwhile, workers who took collective steps by themselves, *Saathi* Chintamani included, were slated to get between Rs. 1,50,000 to 3,00,000.

Saathi Chintamani was present at all the 12 to 14 spots in Faridabad where 5000 copies of FMS have been distributed every month since 1993. When 7,000 copies began to be printed in 2007, *Saathi* Chintamani distributed them now and then at Okhla (Delhi) and Udyog Vihar (Gurgaon) too, apart from Faridabad. With IMT Manesar added to the list, *Saathi* Chintamani was an active participant in the distribution of 8,000, then 10,000, then 12,000 copies of Majdoor Samachar. Narratives by many workers were printed in Majdoor Samachar through *Saathi* Chintamani.

During the Internal Emergency in 1976, when the state demolished many *jhuggis* (shanties), *Saathi* Chintamani began residing in Bapu Nagar, across from Jhadsetli village. 8 kms by cycle to work and 8 kms back, distribution of Majdoor Samachar at various places in Faridabad, visiting workers of this or that factory, in this or that place, all this was part of *Saathi* Chintamani's daily routine. After he shifted to Sanjay Colony from Bapu Nagar, he cycled even more to meet and converse with workers. Since July 2013, *Saathi* Chintamani's body became incapable of standing two-and-a-half hours to distribute Majdoor Samachar. But he did not stop cycling. Half an hour ride to Majdoor Library, to put things in order, divide 13,000 copies into bundles of 50 each for distribution: this remained an integral part of *Saathi* Cintamani's life. He continued the work of sorting 800 copies each month for post,

folding them up, sticking addresses and stamps till his death.

Saathi Chintamani is inseparable from Majdoor Samachar. He lived a full life, exercising all his capabilities. The spirited activities of young workers kept him lively till the end. We can say that till the last moment, his breath kept pace with emergent times.

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